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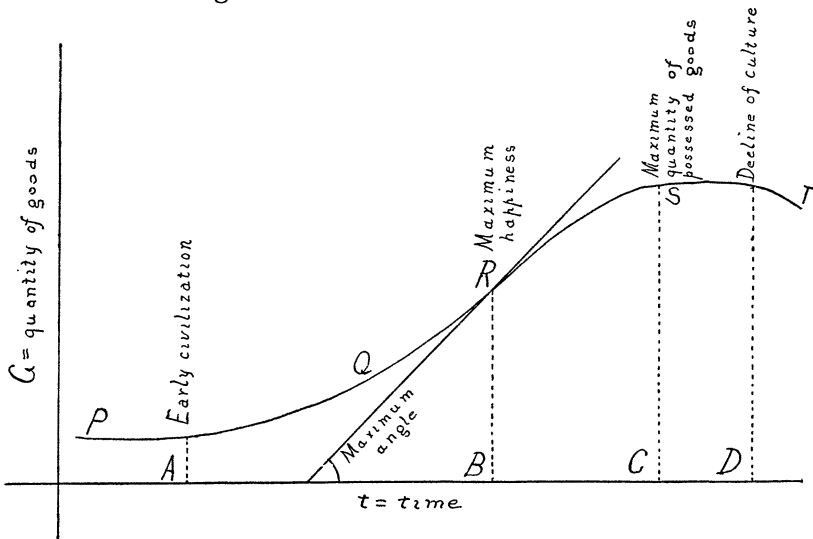
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ON LIFE-SATISFACTION.

THE purpose of this article is to discuss and prove the following proposition: *The degree of life-satisfaction of separate individuals or of whole societies is measured, not by the absolute quantity of goods possessed, but by the rapidity with which this quantity is increasing.* In other words, the feeling of satisfaction or of self-contentment is a result or a function, not of the quantity of goods, but of the rapidity with which the quantity varies from time to time. Mathematically, this proposition may be expressed thus: Let the curve $PQRST$ in the accompanying diagram represent the aggregate quantity of goods—material, moral, and intellectual—possessed at any given time by an individual, a human society, or a nation. This curve, which we may call the “progress curve,” generally has an aspect like that shown in the diagram :



An organism or a society develops first very slowly and then with increasing rapidity; hence the corresponding part, PQ , of the curve (early civilization) rises slantingly. In youth

the process of self-improvement goes on in the most active manner, but when the organism begins to mature, the speed decreases; this is represented by the portion QRS of the "progress curve," rising first rapidly, then more slowly. Finally the organism becomes tired, and decadence is the result; this is illustrated by the last part, ST , of the figure, showing diminishing ordinates. It seems to me—and this is precisely my contention—that an individual or a society feels *most contented, most satisfied*, not at the point S of the curve, but at the point R (*i. e.*, at the point of the greatest inclination of the curve), notwithstanding the fact that the quantity of goods enjoyed at S is perhaps twice as large as that at R . I make this assertion because at R the quantity of goods increases most rapidly in a given time. The individual at this period is sanguine and full of hope; every day brings something new into his life; he is conscious of the fruits of his labor.

At S the contrary is the case. The absolute quantity of goods possessed is here comparatively large; but this quantity is immovable; every day brings the same thing; the entire work of the organism is expended uselessly at some point, just as in a bad machine friction and internal resistances impede the movement—in spite of its labors, it does not go forward. Thus it is clear that life-contentment must be smaller here than at R . Moreover, I assert that even at PQ , where the *absolute quantity* of goods is very small, there is more satisfaction than at S , because there is still some progress at PQ , while there is none at S .

In short, my thought may be expressed mathematically as follows: *The degree of life-satisfaction of an individual or a society is independent of the ordinate of the "progress curve," but is a function of the angle which the tangent to this curve forms with the axle of the abscissæ; or*

$$S = f\left(\frac{dG}{dt}\right),$$

where S is the degree of life-satisfaction, G the quantity of goods possessed, and t the time.¹ The truth of this statement is

¹ For those unfamiliar with mathematical analysis it may be observed that the

proved as well by history as by our observations of ourselves and our surroundings. The historical examples of Greece and Rome are familiar to all. A generally hopeful state of mind existed there precisely at the epoch of the most intensive elaboration of different problems or of the most extensive growth of territory, and not at the period when inventions and discoveries had already been made or territories acquired; in other words, not at the time when the people could enjoy the goods already acquired; on the contrary, just at this epoch a feeling of discontent and pessimism prevailed.

It is interesting to note that nations instinctively feel this. It is always at a definite stage of progress that regrets commence about a pastoral life, about a past golden age, etc. All this is only a reminiscence of times when progress was more rapid and when every day brought something new into life.

Similarly individuals like to remember their youth, although they were then, no doubt, less intellectual and probably poorer than at a later age. But their "progress curve" formed a large angle with the abscissæ axle, the quantity of goods they possessed increased very rapidly, and this overcame all. One learns in his youth that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the two other sides of the triangle; he learns wonderful laws of the movement of celestial bodies, beautiful chemical formulas, the principle of evolution of living creatures. A youth feels for the first time the emotions of love; for the first time he tries to say "yes" and "no" in his own business affairs, insignificant though they be. But all this passes quickly in a few years.

Later the individual learns more about the laws of nature. He is now able to love better women than before, to accomplish more important and more difficult tasks. But, in spite of this, there is at this stage no such intensity of life; the curve ascends slowly, and there is thus less contentment than before. Every-

symbol $\frac{dG}{dt}$ signifies the relative increase of the quantity G with the time t ; the symbol f means function or dependence; so that the above formula can be expressed in words as follows: The degree of life-satisfaction (S) is depending (f) upon the relative growth of the goods possessed (dG) with the time (dt).

one likewise knows from his own vocation that, after the first self-evident improvements have been made, the following ones are not so easy ; the work progresses slowly and does not bring the same satisfaction as before.

The example of a person making money may be quoted as a further proof of my proposition. A merchant experiences a higher degree of satisfaction the better his business is going ; *i. e.*, the more interest he is making on his capital. Suppose he received 20 per cent. on his capital five years ago, and is receiving only 5 per cent. this year. He was undoubtedly more cheerful five years ago than he is today, although his capital, *absolutely speaking*, is considerably greater now than then. But he is enjoying, not the capital itself, but the rapidity of its growth ; and that is a case under my proposition.

Of course, such a general sociological law is very rarely met with, in reality, in its pure aspect. Many other causes and factors are constantly interfering, all together composing, in their complexity, what we call "life." Religion is one of these important factors. It changes considerably the aspect of the "progress curve," in that it planes it. Were it allowable to compare a man or a human society to a machine, religion might be likened, in some respects, to the fly wheel preventing the machine from going either too fast or too slowly. Thus when progress tends to become too rapid, religion will prevent this by its conservatism. But coming, through this very struggle, in contact with progress, religion itself thus takes a step forward. A fly wheel, however, sometimes absorbs a part of the useful work of the machine itself. The church put under its ban the men who asserted that the earth is round ; but today this is being taught even in parochial schools and seminaries, and bad marks are given to pupils who do not know the proofs of the earth's roundness.

Conversely, when an individual or a human society becomes tired, progress begins to slacken, and apathy and pessimism result. Here the church steps in to console by its dogmas and by promises of other joys than those obtainable in this life ; or to convince the sufferer that worldly pleasures are not worth

seeking. In this way religion has helped many individuals and nations to overcome periods of depression in their lives, and prevented their "progress curve" from falling too low. While thus religion, as a fly wheel, by its opposition, takes much joy away from progress, it returns it later, in the form of stored energy, to joyless people.

If my proposition be true, the following consequences must be drawn :

1. If you wish to give pleasure to someone—to a people, a group of persons, a friend, or even to yourself—*always try to do it in the shortest possible time*. Otherwise, if you do it slowly or step by step, the result will be imperceptible. It is better to increase the ordinate of the "progress curve" little and quickly than much and slowly.

2. Notwithstanding the immense progress to be expected in the future, humanity will never be very happy, or, more precisely, *its happiness will never be commensurate with the reached results*, because, to be satisfied, it constantly requires new progress, and because every new step tends to make people more exacting.

If, by some miracle, we were transported a hundred years forward, we should undoubtedly be extremely happy, because a great step would have been taken in a short time, corresponding to a large angle on the "progress curve." But it does by no means follow that people in reality will be very happy after a hundred years. They will have obtained the large quantity of goods in their possession by a long route; the curve will be a slanting one, and the degree of happiness felt will probably be as moderate as our own—perhaps even smaller.

Thus our theorem explains the apparent paradox that, notwithstanding the progress of culture, humanity has not become perceptibly happier. People constantly complain, constantly seek for something better, as they have sought for it in ancient Egypt, in Rome, in the Middle Ages—everywhere and always. The whole paradox is based on a wrong standard of happiness. It is taken for granted that the aggregate amount of goods possessed by a people, and not the rapidity of its increase, constitutes the measure for its happiness.

Let us therefore be calm and not be jealous of posterity. Probably our descendants will fly over the ocean in airships in half an hour; they will possibly and probably make their bread directly from clay; but it is very doubtful whether they will be happier than ourselves. Yet it will be admitted that the final goal of all our activities is happiness; and if this is not attained, what is the good of all the screws and machinery?

3. The third consequence is the most important, because, rightly applied, it reconciles us with life. It may be stated as follows: *It lies within the power of each individual, as of each people, to increase his happiness on earth, independently of the quantity of goods possessed.* It is enough for that purpose to lead an active life, ever to see and attain new results; in short, *to increase the angle of the "progress curve."* Precisely here lies the greatest wisdom of our Creator. It would be a great injustice if our happiness were dependent upon the absolute quantity of goods possessed. Were such the case, those born later would have far better chances for happiness than those born earlier; and it might be said, paraphrasing the well-known sentence of Mephisto in *Faust*: "Weh Dir, dass Du ein *Grossvater* bist!"

Thus in reality the possibility for happiness is given to everyone as a result of his own efforts, independently of the epoch or the place in which he lives. This has been understood by the great moralists of all ages. "The kingdom of God is within you," said Jesus. Socrates taught this truth by his life and his writings; the same was done by Seneca; in our own day it is expounded by Tolstoi.

Perhaps the life of one man means nothing in the world-economy; perhaps he is only a cellule, a link in a great chain, of some great purpose unknown to us, but for which humanity exists. This all may be. But God has given the same possibility for happiness to the cellules, whether living earlier or later; the same possibility for reaching our little final purpose—our personal happiness; the same possibility to all men of all times and all nations. And this possibility is given to us by the property of our nature that *our happiness depends principally on the surplus of goods which we possess, not on their absolute quantity.*

VLADIMIR KARAPETOFF.